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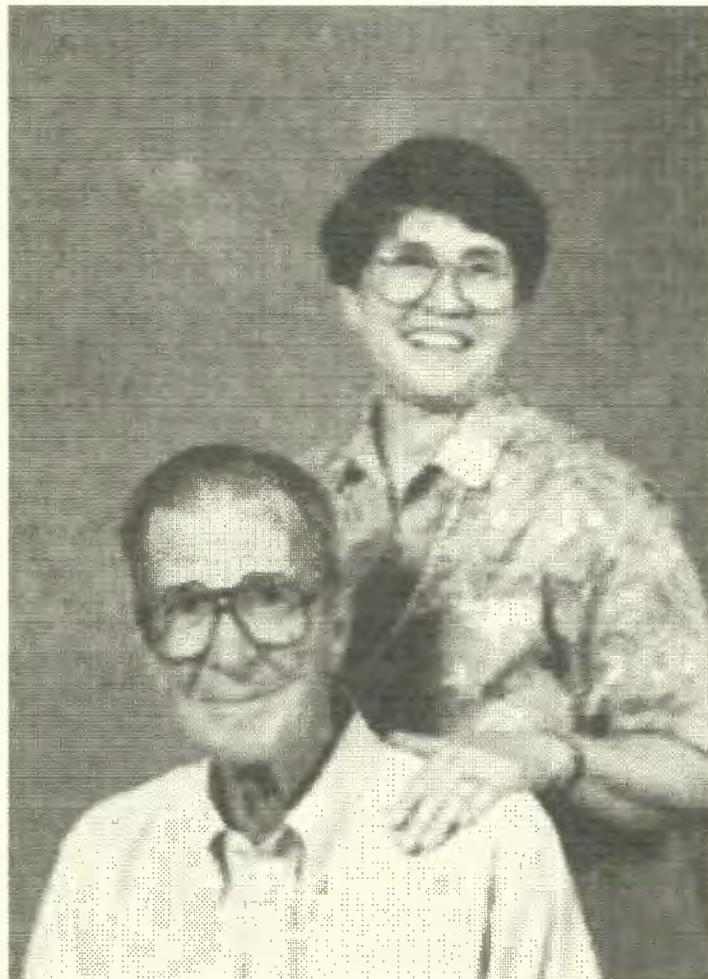
HISTORY

PROJECT



Capturing Memories from Edgecombe

Edgecombe County Genealogical Society



Theophilus Bryan Wells, Jr
W. W. II Veteran
and wife
Ruth Garrett Wells
Retired School Teacher

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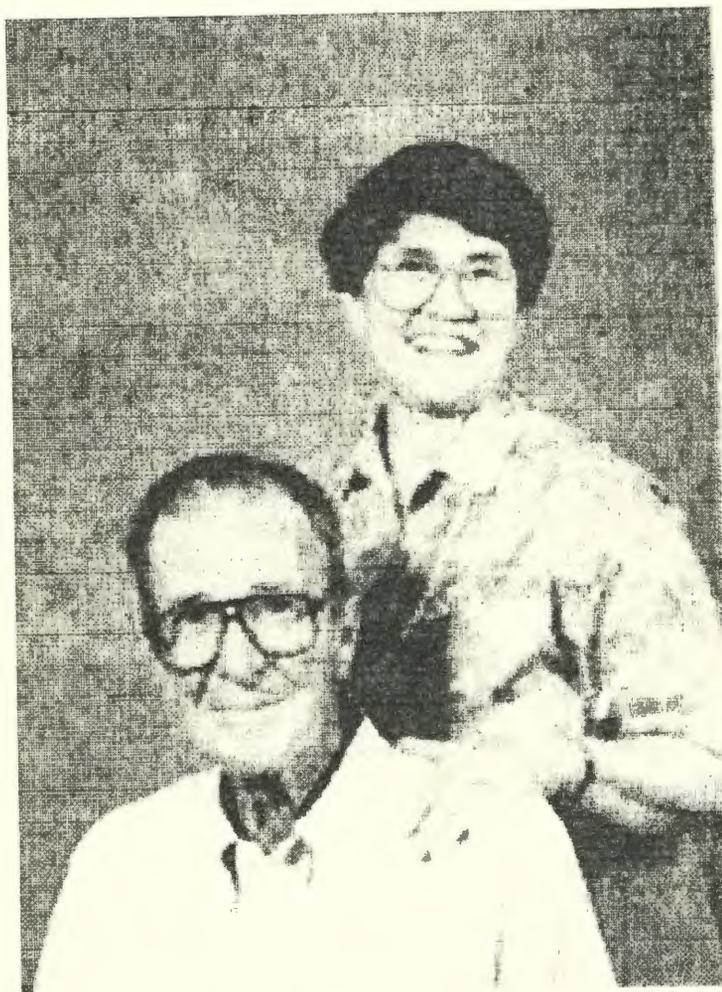
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RELEASE

EDGECOMBE COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

909 Main Street
Tarboro, N. C. 27886

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(Signature) *J. B. Wells*

(Date) 7-20-98

(Researcher's Signature) *Ruth G. Wells*

Date: July 20, 1998

Interviewee Information

Name: Theophilus Bryan Wells
Address: [REDACTED] Whitakers, NC [REDACTED]
Telephone # [REDACTED]
Birth Date: September 30, 1911
Birth Place: Edgecombe Co., Whitakers, NC

Genealogical Information

Parents of Interviewee:

Father: Theophilus Bryan Wells Born: Oct. 25, 1884, Edgecombe Co., Died: Feb. 21, 1946,
Mother: Minnie Price Wells Born: Oct. 07, 1893, Edgecombe Co., Died: Nov 24, 1982,
Other Children: Mary Bryan Wells, Born June 16, 1916 - Feb 4, 1983
Matilda Wells, Born Sept 22, 1920

Grandparents of Interviewee:

Paternal: T. B. Wells Born 7/10/1833, Edge Co. Died 10/19/1884
Swan Drake Born 3/1/1849, Edge Co. Died 8/13/1903
Maternal: Charlie P Price Born 1861, Edge Co Died 1933
Rilla Pitt Born 1870, Edge Co. Died 1955
Great Grands: Thomas Price Born 1825, Edge Co, Died
Susan Shurley Born 1829, Edge Co. Died 1910

Spouse of Interviewee:

Grace Ruth Garrett Wells Born: April 18, 1927, Pickens Co, Norris, SC

Parents of Spouse:

Father: Thomas Moore Garrett Born May 01, 1886, Pickens Co., Norris, SC
Md. Apr. 24. 1917 Died May 26, 1965, Pickens Co
Mother: Grace Mason Stallings Born Mar. 20, 1892, Nash Co., Whitakers, NC
Died June 15, 1928, Pickens Co., Norris, SC

Spouse's Siblings

	Birth Date	Marriage Date	Spouse
Thomas Moore Garrett, II	02/23/1918		Janie Dalton
Jacob Stallings Garrett	07/19/1920		Marli Passarge
Lillian Mason Garrett	11/10/1923	05/10/1952	John Francis Begley
Grace Ruth Garrett	04/18/1927	12/24/1948	T.B. Wells,

Note: This interview was done by Ruth Garrett Wells who took notes based on questions from school. The notes were used by her granddaughter, Scarlet Wells to complete/write a school assignment. We decided to file it in this form. There is no tape with this interview.

T.B. Wells completed the circle around the world in his tour of duty with the U.S. Army in W.W.II.

The Faces and Feelings of World War Two

Scarlet: Before (this interview) the war was known to me as events such as Pearl Harbor and D-Day and people, such as Adolf Hitler and President Roosevelt. The movies tend to glamorize this war and didn't show that real people took part in the war and their lives changed forever. Now I see the war on a more personal level. This is all due to my grandfather, . who was in this war.

Theophilus Bryan Wells, Jr. joined the military on November 19, 1942 at **Fort Bragg, North Carolina**. While he was at Ft. Bragg, he endured many tests such as physical, aptitude, and placement test. Pa left Ft. Bragg on December 3, 1942. From Ft. Bragg he went to **Keesler Field, Mississippi** and then on to **Sioux Falls, South Dakota**, arriving on Christmas Day in 1942. While in Sioux Falls, Pa received training for radio operator and mechanic. Pa left South Dakota on May 19, 1943 and from there went to **Boca Raton, Florida** and on to **Goldsboro, North Carolina**. While in Goldsboro, Pa remembers being able to see his family and friends for the first time since he has left home seven months ago.

From Goldsboro he traveled to **Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia** to get on the **H.M.S. Andes**, which was a British ship. Pa arrived in **Camp Don B. Passage, Casablanca, North Africa** on December 15, 1943. While in Casablanca Pa received more training for conditioning to war. He left North Africa on January 17, 1943 by train. He remembers the train being a 40 + 8 train, which means that there was only enough room for forty men and eight horses. He arrived in **Bombay, India on the H.M.S. Chantilly**, only to leave to travel to **Calcutta** on May 28, 1944. He recalls that they never knew where they were going. They relied on something called the "Shit House Rumor" to have some knowledge on where their next stop would be.

He arrived in **Kunming, China** on April 7, 1944, and received assignment to **21st Photo Reconnaissance Squadron, APO 627**. During this time he had received no word from home. Pa wrote letters but he could not reveal any information regarding his location or destination. Any such information would be blacked out by a black pen.

Being the only male member of his family, Pa was the only one to serve in the war, but his mother and sisters helped him through the war with letters from home. He recalls getting letters from his family, sometimes many letters at once, putting them in order by date. He wanted to know any news about his father's condition. His father had suffered a stroke shortly before Pa went into the military.

When asked if he remembers the blue and gold star flags, Pa said that one hung in his home that showed there was one family member serving in the military.

On **December 7, 1941**, the day **Pearl Harbor was bombed**, Pa recalls sitting at home alone listening to music on the radio. He remembers turning the radio off when the music was interrupted and then turning it back on, curious at what was going to happen. As he turned the radio back on, he heard the news about the bombing at Pearl Harbor. Pa also learned about President Roosevelt's request to Congress to declare war on Japan as he listened to the radio.

He recalls all the sacrifices made at home by the Americans remaining there. **Gas, sugar, shoes, and tires** were only a few of the **items that were rationed during wartime**. He remembers that stickers were used for gas. An "A" sticker meant gas allotted for pleasure driving and a "B" sticker could mean more gas for business purposes.

Pa and his family already had a garden, but he remembers the effort other Americans put into their own (**Victory**) gardens. He also remembers **V-Mail** as something only used by the military people. It has a special machine that could reduce the size of the letter and in doing that it reduced the bulk of the mail in general. Military personnel didn't have to use stamps, only write **FREE** where a stamp would normally be.

He also recalls **scrapmetal and scrap rubber drives as well as War Bonds**. He remembers the scrapmetal and scrap rubber drives and the places that were chosen in town to collect these in areas that were convenient to patrons. He remembers War Bonds on newsreels at the movies that advertised the buying of War Bonds. He also recalls that many times movie stars promoted this.

He remembers that there were **Rationing Boards**, where members of the community served, and interviewed to determine the amount of food and other necessities that were needed. Sugar was one item that was needed for canning and gasoline needed to transport members of the family to the doctor.

As to the role women took in the war, Pa recalls that women replaced men in factories. They also helped with management of farms in the absence of men.

World War II was a war of the "Common soldier" as well as military leaders combined. I asked Pa how he felt about **Dwight Eisenhower, George Patton, Douglas MacArthur, and Omar Bradley**. He remembers Eisenhower as a very capable, outstanding leader. Patton, he said, was one of the greatest military leaders ever. He recalls MacArthur as saying "I shall return", but he was removed from position of leadership because of insubordination. Pa remembers Bradley as the advisor and commander of ground forces in Europe. He will be remembered, in his mind, as essential in decisions. As in any war there is a tragic side. Many people were killed and wounded senselessly. When I asked Pa about any stories of heroism that he remembered, he told me of **Homer P. Braswell of Whitakers, NC**.

Homer was Pa's best friend and was the kind of guy that anybody would love. He was a **pilot in the U.S. Airforce** and was captured after the fall of **Bataan** by the Japanese. He was a part of the **Death March**, Pa was to learn later. I found out that the **Death March** was something that the **Japanese** did to the **American Soldiers** that were captured. **The Japs starved the Americans and made them walk day and night, in any weather condition, until they dropped dead, hence the name Death March.** But, Pa told me that Homer survived this and was later killed on a Japanese ship carrying prisoners to Japan. This ship was torpedoed by American Forces, not knowing that there were American Soldiers on board. Pa remembers getting the news of his death in a letter from his mother.

Pa recalls the **Uncle Sam Poster**. This was a recruiting poster that showed Uncle Sam pointing his finger. Wherever you moved, his eyes followed you. Pa also remembers the U.S.O. shows. He remembers one show that had Pat O'Brien as a guest.

Most Americans have always been traditionally religious, especially during wartime. Pa recalls that church services were provided on base. While he was in **China**, he visited in the home of missionaries that were serving there. He also remembers "Fox Hole" religion, which was a term relating to rough and scary times.

There are always two sides to war, each thinking that they are right and the others are wrong. When I asked Pa about the enemies' leaders such as **Adolf Hitler of Germany, Benito Mussolini of Italy, and Hedeki Tojo of Japan**; he remembers them all as ruthless, greedy, and heartless men.

When I asked Pa if he was worried that the **Eastern Coast of America** was in danger during the war he said that he was a positive thinker and he had every faith in the American Soldiers to win the war. He did recall blackouts at the beach, no cars traveling at night, and that many people had black curtains on their windows.

Pa didn't know of the **invasion of the Allies on D-Day**. Being in the remote area of China, the news they received there was sketchy. Having learned about what happened later, his opinion is the same that he feels about war in general. He said, "War is Hell. The invasion of D-Day was probably necessary, but it remains a tragedy."

He feels that the decision to **bomb Japan** was critical to end the war, but a tragic loss of innocent lives. Americans, at the time of the bombing, were so relieved that the war was over that they didn't take it into account what had really happened in Hiroshima. It was years later that the Americans saw **Hiroshima and Nagasaki** as real places with human beings who paid a price for someone else's decision.

The German concentration camps were the ugliest faces of this horrible war. Pa feels that the cruel destruction of millions of **Jews** as the result of the sick mind of Hitler is a reality Americans must never forget.

The incarcerating of Japanese Americans Pa feels was the correct move at the time. Americans could not trust any Japanese after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Pa said that Americans could sympathize with those who lost homes and jobs and the many families that were separated, however, it would have never happened without a war.

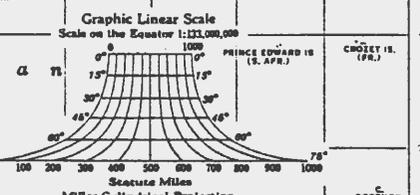
When I asked Pa how he felt about Americans that are preserving the memory of the war, he said, "**The 50th Anniversary of the events of World War II** has passed and I do not know of all the things that are being done about it. But I am pleased that my granddaughter is being able to do this project and that I had the opportunity to share my experiences and opinions with her and they will be passed on to the next generation. As the years pass and my generation, who participated in the war, are no longer living, the war must be kept alive through our grandchildren. The history of war is best recorded by those who were in the war. I pray my children and their children's children will never be called upon to pay the price of experiencing war again."

Before, I wrote this paper, I had heard my grandfather tell about some of his experiences in the war. I had heard him tell how he got a "Dear John" letter in the war and I have seen many pictures of him in his uniform and with some of his buddies in China. But, I had never heard about all he and others went through to make America what it is today. I had never heard about Homer Braswell and all he went through during the war. But I am so grateful now that I had the opportunity to interview my grandfather about World War II. Before this interview, I looked at him as my grandfather and as the man who gave my grandmother wildflowers and was always there for me, my brother, Stephen, my sister, Peggy and the rest of my family. But now I see him for what he was all along but I never realized it until now. I see Pa as a hero, and I thank him for what he has done and all that he and others accomplished during the war.

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THE WORLD



Longitude East of Greenwich Longitude West of Greenwich

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Theophilus Bryan Wells
21st Photo Reconnaissance Squadron. APO 627